

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 NEAE-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04

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FM AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2206

INFO AMEMBASSY COLOMBO

CINCPAC HONOLULU HI

AMEMBASSY DACCA

AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY KABUL

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 NEW DELHI 14987

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

FOLLOWING TEL SENT BOMBAY CALCUTTA & MADRAS NOV 11, 1975,
REPEATED TO YOU. QUOTE

E.O. 1652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, IN

SUBJ: INDIAN ELECTIONS NEXT SPRING?

SUMMARY: THE MOST DEBATED QUESTION IN INDIAN POLITICAL
CIRCLES TODAY IS WHETHER OR NOT MRS. GANDHI WILL USE THE
EMERGENCY TO POSTPONE THE NATIONAL ELECTIONS SCHEDULED
FOR NEXT SPRING. BY HOLDING ELECTIONS NEXT FEBRUARY OR
MARCH, SHE COULD TAKE ADVANTAGE OF A RECORD CROP AND
FAVORABLE PRICE LEVELS. SHE COULD INTERPRET VICTORY
AS A MANDATE FOR HER POLICIES OVER THE PAST SIX MONTHS
AS WELL AS FOR THE NEXT FIVE YEARS. CONVERSELY, A TWO
MONTH ELECTION CAMPAIGN COULD RE-INTRODUCE PRE-EMERGENCY
ECONOMIC, BUREAUCRATIC AND SOCIAL "LAXITY." AND, WHILE
THERE IS NO QUESTION THAT THE CONGRESS WOULD WIN AN
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ELECTION, MRS. GANDHI MIGHT RISK LOSING THE TWO THIRDS

MAJORITY SHE NEEDS TO ENACT CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENTS DESIGNED TO LEGITIMIZE HER POSITION AND PROGRAMS. THOUGH LESS LIKELY, THE PRIME MINISTER MAY ALSO DECIDE TO CIRCUMVENT HER LINGERING CONSTITUTIONAL "PROBLEMS" BY CONVERTING PARLIAMENT INTO A CONSTITUTIONAL ASSEMBLY OR HOLDING ELECTIONS FOR A CONSTITUTIONAL ASSEMBLY. WHATEVER HER DECISION, MRS. GANDHI WILL HAVE TO ANNOUNCE IT BY MID-JANUARY. MEANWHILE, OVER THE UPCOMING TWO MONTHS SHE WILL CONSIDER A CABINET RESHUFFLE AND PRESIDE OVER PARLIAMENTARY AND ALL-INDIA CONGRESS COMMITTEE SESSIONS. SHE MAY ALLOW MORE RELAXATION OF POLITICAL AND PRESS CONTROLS, AND RELEASE MORE POLITICAL PRISONERS, TO GAUGE THE STRENGTH AND TACTICS OF THE OPPOSITION PARTIES. PENDING A FIRM ANNOUNCEMENT, RUMORS AND SPECULATION ON WHETHER AND WHEN ELECTIONS WILL BE HELD WILL MOUNT, WITH NO ONE ENJOYING A REALLY FIRM BASIS FOR ESTIMATING THE PRIME MINISTER'S MIND.

END SUMMARY.

1. THE TERM OF THE PRESENT INDIAN PARLIAMENT EXPIRES IN MARCH 1976. IF HELD ON SCHEDULE, THE INDIAN GENERAL ELECTION WILL TAKE PLACE SOMETIME IN FEBRUARY OR MARCH. UNDER THE CONSTITUTION, THE PRESIDENT CAN EXTEND PARLIAMENT'S LIFE DURING EMERGENCIES BY PERIODS EXTENDING UP TO ONE YEAR. THE CONSTITUTION SETS NO LIMIT ON THE NUMBER OF EXTENSIONS THE PRESIDENT CAN ORDER.

2. THE MOST DEBATED QUESTION AMONG POLITICAL CIRCLES IN INDIA TODAY IS WHETHER OR NOT MRS. GANDHI WILL USE THE EMERGENCY TO POSTPONE ELECTIONS, WILL CONTINUE THE EMERGENCY AND HOLD ELECTIONS AS SCHEDULED, OR, AND THIS IS LESS LIKELY, END THE EMERGENCY AND HOLD ELECTIONS. IN NEW DELHI 12319 WE ANTICIPATED THAT MRS. GANDHI WOULD BE FACED WITH CONFLICTING POLITICAL PRESSURES EVEN AFTER A FAVORABLE SUPREME COURT RULING. SUCH PRESSURES ARE OPERATING NOW WITH RESPECT TO HER DECISION ON ELECTIONS. THE FEELING AMONG CONGEN AND EMBASSY CONTACTS IS HEAVILY LEANING TOWARD ELECTIONS NEXT SPRING. HOWEVER, WE BELIEVE IT IS TOO EARLY TO REACH ANY VALID CONCLUSIONS. MRS. GANDHI'S JUDGMENT WILL BE MADE UP OF A COMPOSITE OF LOGIC, SOME LONG-CONFIDENTIAL

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TERM CONSIDERATIONS, A LOT OF SHORT-TERM FACTORS, A HIGHLY PERSONALIZED SENSE OF POWER POLITICS AND HER OWN FUTURE POSITION. INDEED, SHE MAY CHANGE HER MIND SEVERAL TIMES IN THE COMING WEEKS (AND MAY HAVE IN THE LAST MONTH OR TWO) ABOUT THE DESIRABILITY OF ELECTIONS, AND RUMORS WILL RISE AND FALL ON THE BASIS OF EVERYTHING FROM ASTROLOGICAL PREDICTIONS TO VAGUE ALLUSIONS BY HER PRESUMED CONFIDANTS.

3. PRESSURES FOR ELECTIONS: TO POSTPONE ELECTIONS WOULD STRENGTHEN THE CREDIBILITY OF HER CRITICS AT HOME AND ABROAD WHO CHARGE THAT SHE IS A DICTATOR AND INDIAN DEMOCRACY IS DEAD. CONVERSELY, A RESOUNDING ELECTION VICTORY WOULD CONSOLIDATE MRS. GANDHI'S POLITICAL POWER FOR THE NEXT FIVE YEARS, LEGITIMIZE HER POLICIES OVER THE LAST SIX MONTHS, AND REPRESENT A REPUDIATION OF THE OPPOSITIN'S CHARGE THAT SHE IS A "DICTATOR" AND HAS LOST HER MANDATE AMONG THE PEOPLE.

4. CONGRESS ENJOYS CERTAIN ADVANTAGES NOW THAT IT DID NOT BEFORE THE EMERGENCY. THE OPPOSITION IS FINDING IT EXTREMELY DIFFICULT TO COLLECT FUNDS. MANY OPPOSITION POLITICIANS WHO HAVE ABANDONED THEIR PARTIES OUT OF PERSONAL FEAR OR CONERN FOR THEIR ECONOMIC INTERESTS WILL PROBABLY WORK FOR CONTRASS OR AT LEAST REMAIN POLITICALLY INACTIVE. THE OPPOSITION WOULD HAVE LITTLE TIME TO PUT TOGETHER A UNIFIED FRONT AND MOUNT A CAMPAIGN EVEN IF ITS LEADERS ARE RELEASED. WHILE SOME OPPOSITION LEADERS ACKNOWLEDGE THIS, THEY ALSO ARGUE THAT THEIR SENSE OF COMMON PURPOSE AND UNITY IS GREATER NOW THAN EVER BEFORE AND THAT THEY WOULD BE ABLE TO PUT UP A COMMON FRONT TO CONGRESS WHICH HAS REARELY BEEN POSSIBLE BEFORE. THIS COULD BE TRUE IN CERTAIN AREAS, BUT ON BALANCE WE ARE INCLINED TO BE SKEPTICAL. SIGNIFICANTLY, IF RESTRICTIONS ARE RELAXED FOR A CAMPAIGN, OR EVEN IF THE EMERGENCY IS SUSPENDED, THE GOI COULD LOOK TO THE MISA AS AMENDED, DIR, AND THE PHYSIOLOGICAL "LESSIONS" LEARNED OVER THE PAST SIX MONTHS TO INTIMIDATE THE OPPOSITION. AS IN 1971, MRS. GANDHI COULD MOUNT A CAMPAIGN MIXING OUTSIDE THREATS (I.E. THE ANGLADESH SITUATION, CHINESE MILITANCY) WITH PROMISES FOR AN UNIMPEDED "GARIBI HATAO" (REMOVE POVERTY) PUSH AT HOME. PERHAPS MOST
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IMPORTANT, ELECTIONS HELD IN THE NEXT NEW MONTHS WILL ENABLE CONGRESS TO REAP THE POLITICAL BENEFITS OF THE LARGEST GRAIN HARVESTS IN INDIA'S HISTORY AND OF ESSENTIALLY STABLE PRICE LEVELS.

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 NEAE-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04

H-02 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02

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5. FINALLY, IF THE PRIME MINISTER DECIDES TO DEFER ELECTIONS UNTIL 1977, THERE WILL BE LITTLE SHORT-TERM POLITICAL IMPACT. CONGRESS POLITICIANS SHRUG THEIR SHOULDERS AND TELL US EVERYONE IN THE PARTY WILL ACCEPT HER DECISION. PERSONS ASSOCIATED WITH THE OPPOSITION ACKNOWLEDGE THIS IS TRUE, BUT EXPRESS THE HOPE THAT THERE WILL BE INCREASING MURMURS OF DISCONTENT WITHIN THE COUNTRY AS THE MONTHS GO BY WITHOUT A POPULAR ELECTION.

6. PRESSURES AGAINST ELECTIONS: SINCE JUNE 26, THE GOI AND THE STATE GOVERNMENTS HAVE CREATED A FRESH MOMENTUM FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC PROGRAMS. THIS MOMENTUM COULD BE DISRUPTED BY A TWO-THREE MONTH ELECTION CAMPAIGN. BY LIFTING RESTRICTIONS FOR THE ELECTIONS, THE GOI WOULD RISK RE-INTRODUCING THE ECONOMIC, ADMINISTRATIVE AND SOCIAL "LAXITY" THE EMERGENCY HAS AT LEAST TEMPORARILY CHECKED. ALSO, THE INDIAN VOTER IS UNPREDICTABLE DESPITE THE OBVIOUS ADVANTAGES MRS. GANDHI AND HER PARTY ENJOY. A REVIVED "JANATA" (PEOPLES) FRONT LED BY
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RESPECTED J.P. NARAYAN COULD STILL MAKE INROADS INTO CONGRESS' PARLIAMENTARY STRENGTH, DEPRIVING MRS. GANDHI OF HER PRESENT TWO-THIRDS MAJORITY WHICH SHE NEEDS TO AMEND AWAY CONTINGENTIAL OBSTACLES TO HER PROGRAMS AND POSITION. CONGRESS POLITICIANS PREVIOUSLY TELL US THEY BELIEVE THE PARTY WOULD LOSE SOUNDLY IN BIHAR AND

HAVE DIFFICULTIES IN U.P., GUJARAT, MADHYA PRADESH, AND TAMIL NADU, IN ELECTIONS HELD IN THE NEXT FEW MONTHS, IF (THEY QUALIFY) THE ELECTIONS WERE FAIR.

7. THERE IS ALSO THE POSSIBILITY THAT AN OPPOSITION BOYCOTT OF ELECTIONS COULD VITIATE SOME OF THE BENEFITS (E.G. A PEOPLES' MANDATE, LEGITIMACY) THAT THE ELECTIONS WILL BE HELD TO ACHIEVE. PARTICULARLY IF RESTRICTIONS ARE NOT LIFTED--OR THE EMERGENCY ENDED --THE OPPOSITION COULD CRITICIZE MRS. GANDHI FOR PREPARING RIGGED ELECTIONS THAT ONLY CONGRESS COULD WIN, AND, TO THE OUTSIDE WORLD, COMPARE THE ELECTIONS WITH THOSE HELD IN TOTALITARIAN STATES.

8. THE RELATIVE INSULATION THE INDIAN JUDICIARY ENJOYS UNDER THE CONSTITUTION MAY ALSO BE A FACTOR IN MRS. GANDHI'S DECISION. THE SUPREME COURT'S UNANIMOUS RULING NOVEMBER 7 EXONERATED HER (ALBEIT WITH THE ASSISTANCE OF THE POST-EMERGENCY ELECTORAL LAW AMENDMENTS), BUT THE SUDDEN AND UNEXPECTED NOVEMBER 12 COURT DECISION NOT TO RECONSIDER ITS 1973 "BASIC STRUCTURE" LIMITATION ON CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENTS (NEW DELHI 15057) HAS AGAIN SHARPENED THE EDGE OF COMPLETION BETWEEN THE LEGISLATIVE AND EXECUTIVE BRANCHES ON ONE HAND AND THE COURTS ON THE OTHER. WE THEREFORE WOULD NOT WANT TO RULE OUT AT THIS POINT TWO POSSIBLE ALTERNATIVES OUTLINED IN PARA 4 OF OUR 12635: THE CONVERSION OF PARLIAMENT INTO A CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY TO APPROVE A NEW CONSTITUTION, OR A DRAMATIC CALLING OF ELECTIONS FOR ANEW CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY TO BE CHARGED WITH THE DRAFTING OF A "PEOPLES" CONSTITUTION.

9. ALTHOUGH TECHNICALL THE PRIME MINISTER ONLY HAS TO GIVE A 33 DAY NOTICE OF ELECTIONS, IN FACT HER POLITICAL DECISION ON ELECTIONS WILL ALMOST CERTAINLY HAVE TO BE MADE BY MID-JANUARY AT THE LATEST IF THEY ARE TO BE HELD BEFORE APRIL 1976. CONGRESS STATE GOVERNMENTS AND THE OFFICIAL ELECTION MACHINERY ARE ALREADY PREPARING FOR AN ELECTION ON A CONTINGENCY BASIS, AND CONGRESS HAS BEGUN TO

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TAP BUSINESSES HEAVILY FOR CAMPAIGN FUNDS ALL OVER THE COUNTRY.

10. WE CONTINUE TO EXPECT THAT OVER THE NEXT TWO MONTHS THE PRIME MINISTER WILL KEEPER OPTIONS OPEN ON ELECTIONS AS SHE CONSIDERS A RESHUFFLE OF HER CABINET, HOLDS A PARLIAMENTARY SESSION (LATE NOVEMBER OR DECEMBER), AND AN ALL INDIAN CONGRESS COMMITTEE (AICC) CONCLAVE (DECEMBER 31-JANUARY 2.). SHE WILL IN THE MEANTIME KEEP HER ANTENNAE UP, TESTING THE POLITICAL CLIMATE. SHE COULD ALLOW MORE RELAXATION OF POLITICAL AND PRESS CONTROLS AND RELEASE MORE POLITICAL PRISONERS TO GUAGE THE STRENGTH AND TACTICS (E.G. A RETURN TO "AGITATIONAL" OPPOSITION) OF THE OPPOSITION PARTIES. SHE MAY ALSO CHOOSE MERELY TO TEST HER STRENGTH NEXT

SPRING BY HOLDING STATE ELECTIONS IN KERALA, PONDICHERRY OR
OPPOSITION-CONTROLLED TAMIL NADU. WHATEVER HER COURSE OF ACTION,
PRESENT INDICATIONS ARE THAT SHE WILL NOT ANNOUNCE A DEFINITE
DECISION ON ELECTIONS UNTIL LATER THIS YEAR. IN THE MEANTIME,
RUMORS AND SPECULATIONS (ALTHOUGH NOT IN THE PRESS WHERE IT IS
PROSCRIBED) WILL MOUNT, WITH NO ONE REALLY HAVING A FIRM BASIS
FOR ESTIMATING THE PRIME MINISTER'S MIND.

11. PLEASE CABLE YOUR COMMENTS BY COB NOVEMBER 12.

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